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ABSTRACT

A brief introductory discussion of some of the factors involved in career development includes the potential role of strategically placed people, job satisfaction, and the individual's responsibility for recognizing and making appropriate career choices. A 3-stage career development self-inventory is suggested as a means of raising the level of consciousness about such choices, and the main body of the paper is devoted to discussions of each of the items on the questionnaire as it relates to the library media professional. A copy of the inventory form is attached. (FAA)

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MANAGING YOUR FUTURE:

CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SCHOOL LIBRARY-MEDIA PROFESSIONAL

by

Thomas J. Galvin

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MANAGING YOUR FUTURE:
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Being in the business of educating librarians and media specialists for nearly twenty-five years has given me many opportunities to talk with people about themselves and how they feel about their work and the directions that their lives are taking. Incidentally, let me begin by suggesting that your old library school dean or library science professor can be a very useful person to talk with when you're assessing your own career development. Being in a professional school does generally give a dean or a professor a different perspective on the profession than practitioners have - something practitioners often take a certain pleasure in pointing out to us educators. And sometimes what is really most helpful to you in evaluating your own situation is precisely that--a different perspective.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that the school they graduated from really isn't very interested in them or in their career development after they've gotten their first job. My observation is exactly the opposite of that. And the reason is very simple. Every school is

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concerned about its own reputation. And you don't have to be on the faculty of a professional school or program for very long before you realize that the single most important measure of the quality of that school in the eyes of the world is the career achievement of your alumni. So educators have a self-serving interest in trying to help alumni have the fullest possible career development.

Contrary to the popular belief, many faculty are in very close contact with practice, and therefore potentially in a position to be very helpful in alerting you to opportunities that it might be interesting for you to know about. My observation has been that one difference between those people who seem to do well in career development and those who don't seem to be as successful or as satisfied is that the people who have a lot of opportunities usually also have a number of individuals working on their behalf as unpaid, volunteer career and placement advisers and job scouts. They tend to enlist people who are strategically placed so as to be aware of job possibilities and be in a position to suggest potential candidates. If you're concerned about your own career development, one of the most useful things to do is to enlist a number of strategically placed other people who can be persuaded to share that concern.

But, before discussing specific career development strategies, I'd like first to sketch out some general principles that I think are potentially relevant to career planning, not only in any area of librarianship, but probably in most other occupations as well. Then I'd like to consider some of the special concerns of people in the school field.

First, career development and job satisfaction are very much individual matters, very personal kinds of things. In the last analysis, <u>you</u> have to be willing to take responsibility for what happens to you. If

your job situation is less than satisfactory, it's always at least partially because you allow it to be less than satisfactory. Nobody is an indentured servant, nobody is obliged to stay in any given job. There are almost always choices and decisions to be made. The most difficult problem is to recognize the existence of choices in a timely way, because if you don't act to make a choice, the choices are simply made for you by circumstances and by the passage of time. Taking positive action, making a conscious decision, even if it turns out to be the wrong one, is almost always better than discovering, when it's too late, that there were alternatives open to you ten years, or five years, or two years ago, but they aren't there any more.

But when the choices are there, they aren't always easy to recognize. I'd like to suggest a simple career self-inventory technique that many people have found helpful in raising their own level of consciousness about career choices. If you are interested in the outcomes of your own working life, as early as possible in your career you would be well advised to put to yourself a series of very tough questions and try to come up with a set of very honest responses. This self-inventory process needs to be repeated every three to five years.

The first question is, "Which do I want, a job or a career"? (This is one of those questionnaires where, if the answer to the first question is, "All I want and all I'm ever going to want is just a job and a regular paycheck every two weeks," then you can skip all the remaining questions and just turn in your questionnaire.) The only wrong answer to the "job or career" question, or to any of the questions that come after, is a response in which you're being less than honest with yourself.

If you opt for a career, that implies systematic development and growth over the course of a professional working lifetime. To assess growth, you need some kind of a measure. That means formulating goals and establishing career milestones to make it possible to measure progress, and to help provide direction when making short term job choices.

The next question, if you answered "yes" to "I want a career" is, "How do you plan to go about having one"? Here, there seem to be at least two distinct approaches - some people choose one, some the other, and a great many of us fall somewhere in between. You ought to decide whether you will simply <u>let</u> things happen to you, or try to <u>make</u> things happen for you. Proponents of the unplanned, serendipitous approach to career development behave as if they believed something like this. "If I just do my job as elementary media specialist here at the Horatio C. Pennypacker School as well as I possibly can, my abilities will be recognized and attractive opportunities will come to me." My response would be, "They might - but don't count on it"! Wordsworth writes, "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen." If you wait to be discovered, you could wait an awfully long time. It's not impossible to have an unplanned career, to just let things happen to you, and to enjoy great success. I know people who claim to have done just that. My own preference is to try to make things happen for you, rather than just letting events take their course. People who opt for a planned, systematic, career development seem, in general, to achieve more, but choosing that option does tend to mean more work for you.

Next, you have to ask yourself two very searching and tough questions, and strive to be completely honest with yourself in coming up with answers you can live with.

Tough question number one is, "Just how much and what kinds of talent and ability do I have?" The answer may be, "I don't know." If you don't

know, then the next question is, "Do you really want to try to find out?" Before you answer "yes" to that question too quickly, be warned that finding out how much ability you have could involve taking some serious risks. It could mean accepting a job that you're not wholly confident you really can do, one you might not be totally successful in, one you could even fail at. Sometimes, that's the only way to find out what the limits of your talent and abilities are. Many people never can get over that hurdle. Nobody wants to fail at a job - it's humiliating! And few people are prepared to risk humiliation. Nobody wants to be the one to validate the Peter Drucker hypothesis: "The experience of the human race indicates that the only person in abundant supply is the universal incompetent."

If you found the last question difficult to deal with, the next is even more difficult. It is, "How hard are you really prepared to work?" How ambitious are you? Is there a match among the extent of your ambitions, the extent of your talents, and the amount of time and energy you are able and willing to invest in your work? If those four things don't come out about equal, you've probably got a serious career problem.

I once asked a very experienced senior university administrator what he had observed to be the most common reason that people fail in academic administrative jobs. He said, "The most common reason is that a great many people want to be something (they want the title or the salary or the perquisites), but very few of those people really want to do that thing." That's the outcome of a bad match among ambition, talent, time and energy.

Deciding how ambitious you are is something that it's most useful to do as early as possible in your working lifetime. The trouble with that is, the earlier you decide, the longer you might have to live with the consequences of a bad decision. Ambitious people can pay a fearful price for

being ambitious. And so can the husbands, wives and children who travel with them.

Now, the last question in the Ambition Series - "Will it be worth it?" Almost impossible to answer, because you simply can't know how satisfying the rewards of a particular career pattern will be to you until you've experienced them. By the time you have, it's usually too late in life to turn back. I urge you not to allow anybody else to answer these questions for you. You can use other people to help you formulate the most useful questions, by asking a colleague or a friend whom you trust, for example, "If you were in my situation and thinking about your future, how should I assess my chances to become a coordinator or district supervisor?" Or, you might ask, "Do you think a person like me might make more of a contribution in a public library than in a school media center?" Or, "I'm considering chucking it all after 20 years in this lousy school district and joining the Hell's Angels. What do you think of that idea?"

One word more about the "extent of ambition" question--the question of whether you are willing to pay the personal price that is commensurate with your assessment of your ambition? To what extent are you free to make a unilateral decision in that respect? Traditionally this has been a very difficult problem for married women, whose career opportunities have been limited by the character of their husbands' job patterns. Increasingly today, it's becoming an equally difficult problem for <u>both</u> marriage partners. That may be a positive indication of the progress our society has made toward achieving job parity between men and women.

If you've answered all the preceding questions truthfully and to your own satisfaction so far, you're ready to move to the last series of questions in the Galvin career development self-inventory. The first question is,

"What do I want to be when I grow up?" (I have a friend who's 55 years old and hasn't been able to answer that question for himself yet.) The question is, "What do I want my last professional job - the job I'll retire from - to be?" One might have several alternatives, especially if you're under thirty. The answer doesn't have to be a specific job, but you ought to have in mind a general type and level of position, salary, status, level and span of responsibility.

When you've identified that ultimate career goal, then you're in a position to ask some important corollary questions, such as:

> What intermediate steps would constitute milestones to use in measuring my progress toward that ultimate goal?
>
> What kinds of experience, skills and credentials will I have to acquire to reach that ultimate goal?
>
> How much time have I got to achieve it?

The general answer to that last question is _"You are almost always older than you think you are, and therefore there is almost always less time than you think there is."

I'd like to look next at what seem to me some of the special career development concerns of people in the school library-media field. The classic problem, as I see it, is the isolation of the school librarian. A great many, perhaps most, school libraries are one-man or, more often, one-woman operations. You're the only librarian in the school. You might even be the only librarian in the entire school district. I've seen the perfectly dreadful impact that kind of isolation can have on a young librarian. You can very easily feel, and in fact become, almost totally cut off from contact with other library-media professionals. You often really can't identify with the classroom teachers completely, because your professional world view and your perspective on the educational enterprise are, necessarily, slightly but significantly different from theirs.

Along with the feeling of being cut off from the larger library professional community, there are other problems. In isolation, it becomes very difficult to appraise your own development as a professional. There's often nobody who is able to evaluate your work and there are no peers to judge yourself or your own performance against.

One technique to deal with that problem is to keep in touch through the professional literature, especially the journals. Another, that surprisingly few school librarians use, is to make contact with librarians in other types of libraries in the area. The public library is an obvious point of professional contact, yet it's amazing how often a public librarian and a school librarian have worked in the same small community for years, serving largely a common clientele, but have never met.

Another aspect of the isolation of the librarian within the school and the school system is that it can often result in a very early flattening out of career development and salary growth. When you're ready to move beyond the building level, there just isn't any job within the system to move up to. If you're not geographically mobile, it can seem as if you're simply stuck with and in the job you have until you either retire or hit it big in the lottery.

Here's where you really have to be creative to enhance your job satisfaction. If you're not restricted by a collective bargaining agreement, see if there aren't possibilities to enlarge your present responsibilities by the technique of horizontal job expansion. In any school, there are almost always jobs that need doing that aren't large enough to justify a full-time person. I think more and more we're going to see the phenomenon in the library field of the expandable, organic job description, where the job content and scope can grow to accommodate cases in which the talents

and skills individuals have aren't being fully utilized, and there isn't any higher level position available to promote them to. There are also more radical options; moving to another type of library in the same community, or into another kind of job - a non-library job - within the school. A few of my contemporaries, who've been school librarians for twenty years, are becoming candidates for principalships, assistant superintendencies, even superintendencies. Why isn't twenty years of administering a school-media program as appropriate a qualification for being superintendent of schools as twenty years of directing boys' physical education?

The other alternative, one that's becoming increasingly common in our field because of lack of geographic mobility combined with layoffs as a result of economic retrenchment and declining enrollments, is that more and more librarians and media specialists are finding a market for their skills in environments other than schools and libraries. A librarian named Betty-Carol Sellen has just published a book called What Else You Can Do With a Library Degree. In it, fifty-seven people who were trained as and worked for a time as librarians describe their experience in successfully applying their information skills in non-library environments. As an educator, I see more and more of our new graduates, especially those who aren't able to leave the Pittsburgh area, successfully finding, and in some cases even creating, jobs for themselves as information or media professionals in corporations, industries, government agencies and health care organizations. A Pittsburgh colleague, Dr. Anthony Debons, has just completed for the National Science Foundation the first national survey of the job market for information professionals. He found that there are 1,600,000 jobs, of which only ten percent are in libraries, for people with information skills. And the information industry is expanding faster than any occupational field in the country.

But let us come back for a moment to the more conventional pattern of career development, one that occurs within the established parameters of librarianship. Again, professional isolation is a special problem for the school librarian. To overcome it, you simply have to find a way to connect into the larger state and national professional community. That means getting to professional meetings and joining professional organizations. Doing so requires time and money, both of which can present major problems. Released time for school librarians is becoming more and more difficult, especially in districts operating under collective bargaining agreements.

From a career development point of view, however, I can't emphasize too strongly that the key to being considered for higher level job opportunities in the library field is recognition beyond your own immediate working environment. Let me confirm something that you've probably already suspected. To a large extent, it <u>is</u> who you know and who knows you that often seems to determine whether you get a chance to be considered on your merits for advancement within the field. And for most people, the most effective way to achieve recognition is through active membership and participation in state or national professional organizations.

Finally, of course, it's necessary at least to mention the importance of continuing education as a vehicle for professional career development. The literature on that topic in our professional journals has become almost as abundant as the growing range and variety of CE opportunities themselves. All signs point to still more expansion of lifelong learning programs for library-media professionals in the future.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT SELF-INVENTORY

Directions: Be ABSOLUTELY HONEST with yourself in answering each question.

STAGE 1:

1. Do I want a) just a job? b) a career?

If "a," do not answer any further questions, turn in your questionnaire, and go watch TV. If "b," go on to Stage 2 below.

STAGE 2:

1. Will I a) simply let things happen to me? b) try to make things happen for me?

2. Just how much and what kinds of talent and ability do I have?

   Am I willing to take the risks involved in finding out?

3. How much and how hard do I really want to work?

4. How ambitious am I?

   How ambitious will my personal circumstances and commitments to others allow me to be?

5. Will the career goal I'm striving to reach be satisfying to me when and if I reach it?

If you have answered all five questions to your own satisfaction, you may proceed to Stage 3 below.

STAGE 3:

1. What do I want to be when I grow up?

2. What would be intermediate milestones toward that goal?

3. How much time have I got?

4. How much of my time, money and energy am I willing and able to invest in any or all of the following career development strategies?

   a) attendance at professional meetings -

      library/non-library organizations
      local/state/national

   b) active participation in work of professional organizations

   c) writing for publication

STAGE 3 - No. 4 (continued)--How much of my time, money and energy am I willing and able to invest in any or all of the following career development strategies?

d) continuing education

to update my skills
to enlarge my skills
to expand future job opportunities in my field
to change my library specialization
to change careers

e) moving into

another type of library
a non-library position within education
another career field.